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DARK UNDEAD

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EDITORIAL: ON THE MOVE!

Greetings after a longer than usual hiatus. We're a bit late this time round, but we have not been idle. In fact, quite a bit has been happening with OH. Last month our website won an honorable mention for interface design in the North Bay Multimedia Association's "Best of the North Bay '99" competition. This was a fortuitous event, because it led to a meeting with the proprietor of Webtraders, an internet site that offers shopping cart services for small businesses. We have cut a deal that will finally enable international subscribers to OH to pay by credit card, thus evading those exorbitant currency exchange fees. You'll find the full info on our website.

As our circulation has remained above the hundred mark (110 this time round), the promised ¢25/issue price break now goes into effect. The next one sets in when we reach a circulation of 209. By the time you read this, the URL for our website will also have changed. We are now "otherhands.com," and have signed up with a new local host (priratehosting.com) which will give us lots more space to expand into new gaming horizons.

As for industry news, there's "lots and none at all," as Bilbo would say. ICE, I am told, has put ALL of its Middle-earth product lines on indefinite hold (though they HAVE in fact renewed their role playing license with Tolkien Enterprises and continue to entertain possibilities for dovetailing new releases with the Peter Jackson movies). Happily, this dearth of activity is compensated for by the onslaught of Mithril's new LotR miniature range. (See back cover for details.) To this has been added, rather unexpectedly, yet another range of Middle-earth figures by UK-based Harlequin Miniatures.

One other piece of miniature news: Mithril will be phasing out production of virtually all its previous releases. There are plans in the works, however, to produce a comprehensive archival book documenting the entire range. This book will contain photos of all of the figures, along with extensive commentary (where relevant) on their connection to the MERP series. The goal is to have this book in print before the first of the movies conies out.

And what about The Oathbreakers ? Well, work continues. I am still hopeful that it will be ready before the end of this year. This issue's feature is a contribution towards that goal. While developing stats for the more than 60 NPCs showcased in the module, it quickly became apparent to us that the existing MERP spell lists were largely irrelevant to undead spell-casters. To remedy this difficulty, Sam Daish and I have gone through the canon with a fine-toothed comb in an effort to better discern the "magical" powers and limitations Tolkien ascribed to the dead. To maintain the balance between the practical and the theoretical in the pages of OH, we've included some concrete game mechanics for actualizing the ideas we've come up with.

Our Mithril centerfold this issue has been selected to complement the theme of undead, and Rastarin's Log has been given a bit more space so that it can be brought to a swifter conclusion next issue (where the confrontation with Irusan takes place).

Apologies once again for this issue's tardiness. I've been devoting a good amount of my summer to lining up material in advance for the next two issues. Lots of exciting stuff on the way!

LR4 Blue Wizard of the East

DARK UNDEAD

Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novate CA 94948, USA (chris1224@aol.com)

Sam Daish: 7/38 Cleveland St., Brooklyn, Wellington, New Zealand (sdaish@voyager.co.nz)

The need for this article arose out of the authors' work on The Oathbreakers supplement. In our attempt to arm the Dead with appropriate supernatural powers, we soon found the standard MERP spell lists to be a flawed vessel, and decided that a fresh examination of the primary sources was in order.

Our aim is twofold: 1) to present, as best as we are able, a coherent picture of the powers and limitations of the undead as described or alluded to in Tolkien's writings, and 2) to suggest suitable game mechanics for expressing those powers. A degree of subjectivity in executing both ofthese goals is inevitable for a topic as murky and complex as this, and we welcome conversation with alternative viewpoints as we hone this system towards its final incarnation in The Oathbreakers.

STORY-TELLING AND METAPHYSICS

To rationalize about the undead for the sake of game mechanics is, in a sense, to deny them their most basic power: the *unreasoning* terror they inspire in the living. A key ingredient of such terror is the uncertainty of its object, the fear of the unknown. Consider Gollum's conversation with Sam about the corpse-candles in the Dead Marshes:

'It was a great battle. Tall Men with long swords, and terrible Elves, and Orcses shrieking. They fought on the plain for days and months at the Black Gates. But the Marshes have grown since then, swallowed up the graves; always creeping, creeping.'

'But that is an age and more ago,' said Sam. 'The Dead can't really be there! Is it some devilry hatched in the Dark Land?'

'Who knows? Sméagol doesn't know,' answered Gollum. 'You cannot reach them, you cannot touch them. We tried once, yes, precious. I tried once; but you cannot reach them. Only shapes to see, perhaps, not to touch. No precious! AH dead.'

Sam looked darkly at him and shuddered again, thinking that he guessed why Sméagol had tried to touch them. (LotR 11.235-236)

The prime story-telling function of undead is to evoke horror, and more horror. The less said, the better. All the same, this calculated obscurity presents a formidable obstacle to an investigation of the sources, not merely because the operations of any given power may be difficult to tease out, but because the very boundary dividing true undead from mere phantasms is itself opaque. Do the corpse-candles really illumine the souls of the unquiet dead, or are they in fact "some devilry hatched in the Dark Land" to deceive and terrify unwanted trespassers? If the latter were true, then to include the corpse-candles in a discussion of the powers of the undead would be potentially misleading.

There is a practical side to this dilemma: to err on the side of caution by including in the discussion every suspect, merely because it *seemed* to be undead, would make the investigation hopelessly vast and not necessarily more illuminating.

A sounder strategy would be to focus on characters whose undead status is indisputable, ascertain what powers they share in common, and use that as the lens through which to examine more dubious candidates. Of course, the act of deciding whether something is truly undead or not involves some prejudgment about what constitutes undeath. At the same time, the elements of any working definition are likely to be modified in the course of the investigation.

For the moment, we adopt a commonsensical definition: undeath is a condition that can only be experienced by an entity capable of *dying*, and for which death is regarded as the natural culmination of life. This definition automatically rules out two look-alikes: 1) illusory phantasms made to *seem* like apparitions of the Dead, and 2) immortal beings whose presence or appearance inspires reactions similar to those elicited by true undead.

With this rough and ready yardstick on hand, we now embark on a brief hitchhiker's tour of all alleged incidences of undeath in Tolkien's mythology, identifying the uncertain cases and taking hold of the indisputable ones.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Considering the size of the Tolkien corpus (in excess of 7,000 pages if the History of Middle-earth series is included), the discernable appearances of prospective undead are few and far between. But the episodes in which they do appear are striking and memorable. Below we list and consider each in its chronological place within the history of Arda:

- **Gorlim's wraith:** Slain by Sauron after betraying the location of Barahir's camp, Gorlim's wraith appears to Beren in a dream, confessing his crime and warning Beren of his father's impending doom (Sil.162; cf. HoMe III.164-165). One could, of course, question the veracity of the wraith-element, even though the dream itself was "true;" but such skepticism would be misplaced, since either way Gorlim's period of undeath appears to have been fleeting. There is no indication that Gorlim's wraith *remained* in the world after delivering its appointed message.[1]
- **Werewolves and Vampires:** The tale of Beren and Lúthien is replete with enchanted creatures, some of which might be suspected of being undead. Werewolves are said to be "fell beasts inhabited by dreadful spirits that [Sauron] had imprisoned in their bodies (Sil.164)," but it is not specified here what *kind* of spirits are being alluded to. Elsewhere in the story Tolkien gives hints that these were demonic, not mortal, spirits (Sil. 180, 185; cf. Let.381).[2] As for vampires, the

elusive Thuringwethil seems clearly to have been an immortal who merely assumed the *form* of a blood-sucking bat (Sil.178; cf. HoMe V.393, where Tolkien explicitly calls her a "bat-shaped fay").

- **Ringwraiths:** A surer case of undeath than this cannot be hoped for.[3]
- **Barrow-wights:** From a story-telling perspective, the Hobbits' encounter with the Barrow-wight is the quintessential undead episode of *The Lord of the Rings*. But does it stand up to our definition of undead? Here we encounter the same ambiguity as with the werewolves, only without any corroborating hints to tip the scales one way or the other. All that is said is that "evil spirits out of Angmar and Rhudaur entered into the deserted mounds and dwelt there" (LotR III.321; cf. UT.348). Hence, for the purposes of this article, we must ignore this otherwise tantalizing source of information.
- **Dwarves:** As a negative example, Tolkien states with confidence: "Though they could be slain or broken, they could not be reduced to shadows enslaved to another will (LotR III.358)."
- **Ghosts of Osgiliath:** At the Council of Elrond, Elrond reports that with the fall of Minas Ithil to the Ringwraiths, "shadows walked" in the ruins of neighboring Osgiliath (LotR I.258). The parallel account in "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age" states: "Then Osgiliath, which in the waning of the people had long been deserted, became a place of ruins and a city of ghosts (Sil.297)." Although Tolkien's vocabulary for undead is largely interchangeable and non-specific as regards to kind, "ghost" tends to refer to mortals. If this is its implication here, then we have unambiguous evidence of other true undead. Sadly, we are given absolutely no information on these ghosts and so know nothing about their powers and limitations. It might be surmised from the context of the references, however, that Tolkien was alluding to the Ringwraiths' use of Morgul-knives, whose victims are transformed into wraiths "under the dominion of the Dark Lord (LotR 1.234)." It is known from other accounts of this period that such knives were used against the Dúnedain of Gondor (LotR III.333).
- **Corpse-candles:** The ambiguity of this episode has already been reviewed. In favor of the phantasm argument, it should not be forgotten that Sauron was perfectly capable of using his sorcery to counterfeit the forms of the dead (Sil.163).
- **The Oathbreakers:** The status of the Dead Men of Dunharrow, like that of the Ringwraiths, is hardly in question.
- **Deadmen's Dike:** Barliman Butterbur makes a passing reference to the ruins of Fornost: "That's haunted land, they say (LotR III.273)." But as this is only hearsay from a man who has never actually been there (and one who may perhaps be thought less authoritative than Elrond in the case of Osgiliath), not much can be made of it. Even if it were haunted - haunted by what? The ghosts of Men or demonic spirits?
- **Zombies in Valinor:** Believe it or not, Tolkien actually hypothesized conditions under which animated, soulless bodies might exist within Arda. The passage in which this idea appears is quoted on p. 6 below. It would not make much sense to include it in our list however, (except as a negative example), since it is only a hypothetical situation, not actually realizable, and it could only happen in Valinor, so its value for adventures set in Middle-earth is nil.

So, having winnowed the wheat from the chaff, we are left with four indisputable cases, one of which (Osgiliath) provides no actual description of powers/limitations though the Morgul-knife element is itself of great value, even if it cannot be connected with certainty to this instance. Gorlim too is of limited value, because of the ephemeral quality of his "undead moment." But his use of the medium of dream to commune with the living is of great interest, and in fact will prove an important link in our discussion of the modes of apparition available to the Dead.

Undeath, then, is experienced when a mortal becomes enslaved to *aerial longevcity* beyond the limit of its biological and spiritual nature...

Setting aside these two marginal episodes, there are but two instances of true undeath in the whole of Tolkien's mythology - the Ringwraiths and the Oathbreakers - but because they are so well-described their example will carry us a long way towards our goal. The undead are, by their very nature, exceptions to a rule, and since these two exceptions are so different from one another (one a creation of evil necromancy, the other brought about by a prophetic curse pronounced by a "good" hero) their idiosyncrasies will serve as checks and balances on one another for the purpose of generalization.

Still, if all we had were Tolkien's story telling perspective, we would be doomed to stumble about in a devil's murk of uncertainty on many important questions. Fortunately, Tolkien did spend a good deal of time pondering metaphysical matters - not necessarily or exclusively about the undead, but about powers of the mind and other qualities (like invisibility) which the undead manifest in his stories. A large part of this essay will bring these fascinating ruminations to bear more directly on the Dead.

Undeath, then, is experienced when a mortal becomes enslaved to *aerial longevity* beyond the limit of its biological and spiritual nature...

THE NATURE OF UNDEATH

An adequate understanding of undeath requires a more precise awareness of Tolkien's conception of *death* and its differential relationship to the characters inhabiting his story-world. Happily, his published letters offer a number of candid, "behind the scenes" statements concerning these matters. "Of course," he writes, "in fact exterior to my story, Elves and Men are just different aspects of the Humane, and represent the problem of Death as seen by a finite but willing and self-conscious person. In this mythological world the Elves and Men are in their incarnate forms kindred, but in the relation of their 'spirits' to the world in time represent different 'experiments', each of which has its own natural trend, and weakness (Letters.236)."

Tolkien goes on to describe death "as part of the nature, physical and spiritual, of Man (Letters.237)," an expression he explains at greater length elsewhere:

> ...the point of view of this mythology is that 'mortality' or a short span, and 'immortality' or an indefinite span was part of what we might call the biological and spiritual *nature* of the Children of God, Men and Elves (the firstborn) respectively, and could *not* be altered by anyone (even a Power or god), and would not be altered by the One, except perhaps by one of those strange exceptions to all rules and ordinances which seem to crop up in the history of the Universe, and show the Finger of God, as the one wholly free Will and Agent. (Letters.204)

The "exception" to which Tolkien alludes here is not the undead, but rather Beren's return to life after having died *(ibd)*. The

terms in which the issue has been cast here would seem, on the face of it, to rule out the possibility of undead. That this is not the case can be seen from another letter, which makes the same point in slightly different terms:

> The view is taken (as clearly reappears later in the case of the Hobbits that have the Ring for a while) that each 'Kind' has a natural span, integral to its biological and spiritual nature. This cannot really be *increased* qualitatively or quantitatively; so that prolongation in time is like stretching a wire out ever tauter, or 'spreading butter ever thinner' - it becomes an intolerable torment. (Letters. 155)

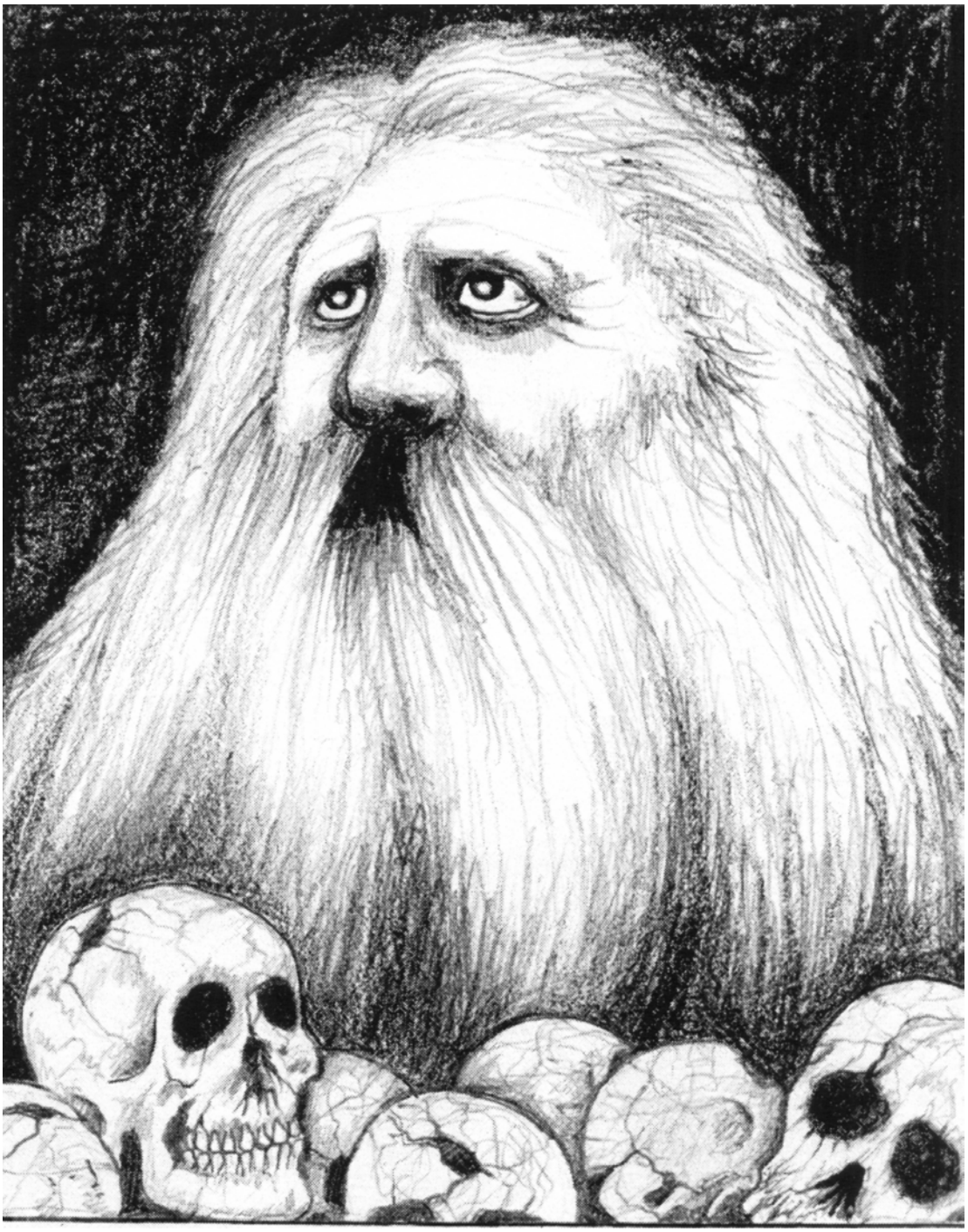
In this potent image of stretching we have the clearest and most precise definition of undeath: a state of ever-intensifying spiritual (and, prior to death in the case of the Ringbearers, bodily) torment brought about by the spirit's unnaturally prolonged presence in the world beyond its ordained span.[4] It is a torment precisely *because* the spirit's nature cannot be altered so as to cope with its unnatural persistence in time. It follows from this that a spirit can only be subjected to such a state *against its will;* hence for both the Oathbreakers and the Ringwraiths, some force of external compulsion must be applied to keep them within the world (Sauron's ring or Isildur's curse).

From a storytelling perspective, some deception (or self-deception) is thus required to explain how otherwise rational beings would allow themselves to fall prey to such a condition. In this connection, Tolkien writes: "Longevity or counterfeit 'immortality' (true immortality is beyond Ea.) is the chief bait of Sauron - it leads the small to a Gollum, and the great to a Ringwraith (Letters.286)." In another letter, Tolkien made so bold as to declare this to be the central "message" of *The Lord of the Rings*:

> But certainly Death is not an Enemy! I said, or meant to say, that the 'message' was the hideous peril of confusing true 'immortality' with limitless serial longevity. Freedom from Time, and clinging to Time. The *confusion* is the work of the Enemy, and one of the chief causes of human disaster. (Letters.267)

Undeath, then, is experienced when a mortal becomes enslaved to *serial longevity* beyond the limit of its biological and spiritual nature. It follows from this that Elves cannot experience true undeath, because serial longevity within the world is their natural mode of existence (HoMe X.331). At the same time, it must be remembered that Elves can be slain and disembodied just like the spirits of Men, and this state *is* unnatural, since both Elves and Men are *incarnate* beings who, by definition, can only exist naturally when "body and spirit are integrated" (Letters.205; cf. HoMe IX.194-195; HoMe X.218, 315, 317).[6]

This conception of undeath raises a very practical question for those wishing to play undead characters in a game: if the experience of unnatural persistence in the world is indeed "an intolerable torment," in what ways might this condition impose *limitations*



upon a character's actions? Even more fundamentally: if the normal process of a character's development (acquisition and improvement of skills, enhancement of stats, etc.) is contingent upon the integral functioning of body and spirit, will undeath *arrest* or even *reverse* such development, and if so to what degree?

CONSEQUENCES OF UNDEATH

In a pivotal statement from *The Lord of the Rings,* clearly reflective of the view of undeath expressed above, Gandalf explains the effect of the Rings thus: "A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness (LotR 1.56)." This image of "mere continuity" conveys a powerful sense of stasis and stagnation - cryogenic freeze immediately springs to mind as a possible analogy - in which "growth" becomes meaningless fiction.

The concept is an important one, and so we are not surprised to find some important elucidations of its background in Tolkien's letters:

> The chief power (of all the rings alike) was the prevention or slowing of *decay* (i.e., 'change' viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance - this is more or less an Elvish motive. (Letters. 152)

> Mere *change* as such is not represented as 'evil': it is the unfolding of the story and to refuse this is of course against the design of God. But the Elvish weakness is in these terms naturally to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change: as if a man were to hate a very long book still going on, and wished to settle down in a favourite chapter. Hence they fell in a measure to Sauron's deceits: they desired some 'power' over things as they are...to make their particular will to preservation effective: to arrest change, and keep things always fresh and fair. (Letters.236)

> But the Elves are *not* wholly good or in the right. Not so much because they had flirted with Sauron; as because with or without his assistance they were 'embalmers'. They wanted to have their cake and eat it: to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth because they had become fond of it (and perhaps because there they had the advantages of a superior caste), and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, keep it as a pleasaunce, even largely a desert, where they could be 'artists' - and were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret. (Letters. 197)

> For Elves, being by nature longeval, such halting of change had no (immediate) detrimental effects; indeed it was by the power of Nenya and Vilya that Lothlórien and Rivendell became islands of beauty and delight - to mortal visitors as well as Elves. But a mortal who came into direct contact with that "embalming" power, concentrated in one of the Elven-rings, would experience this embalming as weariness and torment. This was true not only of the Rings but also of the land of Aman. In "Akallabêth," Elven messengers warn the Númenóreans against deceiving themselves by their desire to visit the Undying Lands and share in the immortality of its inhabitants:
>
> 'The Doom of the World,' they said, 'One alone can change who made it. And were you so to voyage that escaping all deceits and snares you came indeed to Aman, the Blessed Realm, little would it profit you. For it is not the land of Manwë that makes its people deathless, but the Deathless that dwell therein have hallowed the land; and there you would but wither and grow weary the sooner, as moths in a light too strong and steadfast.' (Sil.264)

> On first glance, the implications of this passage seem to be the opposite of the effect produced by a mortal wearing one of the Great Rings (insomuch as growth is hastened rather than arrested), but a late text entitled "Aman and Mortal Men" reveals that the discrepancy is only apparent. (Tolkien throughout uses the Quenya terms *fëa* and *hröa* to designate spirit and body respectively.):
>
> But let us suppose that the 'blessing of Aman' was also accorded to Men. What then? Would a great good be done to them? In the seventh part of a year a Man could be born and become full-grown, as swiftly in Aman a bird would hatch and fly from the nest. But then it would not wither or age but would endure in vigour and in the delight of bodily living. But what of that Man's *fëa?* Its nature and 'doom' could not be changed, neither by the health of Aman nor by the will of Manwë himself. Yet it is (as the Eldar hold) its nature and doom under the will of Eru that it should *not* endure Arda for long, but should depart and go elsewhither, returning maybe direct to Eru for another fate or purpose that is beyond the knowledge or guess of the Eldar.
>
> Very soon then the *fëa* and *hröa* of a Man in Aman would not be united and at peace, but would be opposed, to the great pain of both. The *hröa* being in full vigour and joy of life would cling to the *fëa,* lest its departure should bring death; and against death it would revolt as would a great beast in full life either flee from the hunter or turn savagely upon him. But the *fëa* would be as it were in prison, becoming ever more weary of all the delights of the *hröa,* until they were loathsome to it, longing ever more and more to be gone, until even those matters for its thought that it received through the *hröa* and its senses became meaningless. The Man would not be blessed, but accursed: and he would curse the Valar and Aman and all the things of Arda. And he would not willingly leave Aman, for that would mean rapid death, and he would have to be thrust forth with violence. But if he remained in Aman, what should he come to, ere Arda were at last fulfilled and he found release? Either his *fëa* would be wholly dominated by the *hröa,* and he would become more like a beast, though one tormented within. Or else, if his *fëa* were strong, it would leave the *hröa.* Then one of two things would happen: either this would be accomplished only in hate, by violence, and the *hröa,* in full life, would be rent and die in sudden agony; or else the *fëa* would, in loathing and without pity desert the *hröa,* and it would live on, a witless body, not even a beast but a monster, a very work of Melkor in the midst of Aman, which the Valar themselves would fain destroy.
>
> Now these things are but matters of thought, and might-have-beens; for Eru and the Valar under Him have not permitted Men as they are to dwell in Aman. Yet at least it may be seen that Men in Aman would not escape the dread of death, but would have it in greater degree and for long ages. (HoMe X.229-430)

This fascinating passage - a kind of "reverse" undeath, in which it is not the spirit's, but the body's, unnatural persistence that breeds an intolerable torment for the victim - serves a number of purposes. It demonstrates how thorough was Tolkien's insistence on the principle that Men must die, so that any imaginable means of escape - rings or deathless lands - would result in only worse misery. More to our purpose, it drives home again the central qual-

ity of undeath already seen in the case of the Ringwraiths - the unnatural arrest of growth - and imagines an array of hypothetical negative consequences which this state would entail for the functioning of body and/or spirit. The two basic forces of entropy -with which the persisting spirit must contend, it would seem, are: 1) a tedious loathing of its own consciousness, leading to a total breakdown of perception, as the information conveyed to the mind by its senses becomes increasingly unintelligible (due to the mind's own willful abhorrence of the world around it), and 2) a consequent tendency towards bestiality and madness. These effects would naturally work themselves out somewhat differently "in reverse" - i.e., if the victim was a disembodied rather than an embodied spirit - but the overall trend would seem applicable to both instances, since they arise from the same problem (violation of natural lifespan and the resulting disharmony of body and spirit).

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A different kind of obstacle may be seen in a less obvious case, Morgoth's disembodiment and expulsion from the world:

> ...in seeking to absorb or rather to infiltrate himself throughout 'matter', what was then left of him was *no* longer powerful enough to reclothe itself. (It would now remain *fixed* in the *desire* to do so: there was no 'repentance' or possibility of it: Melkor had abandoned for ever all 'spiritual' ambitions, and existed almost solely as a desire to possess and dominate matter, and in Arda in particular.) At least it could not yet reclothe itself. We need not suppose that Manwë was deluded into supposing that this had been a war to end war, or even to end Melkor. Melkor was not Sauron. We speak of him being 'weakened, shrunken, reduced'; but this is in comparison with the great Valar. He had a being of immense potency and life. The Elves certainly held and taught that *fëar* or 'spirits' may grow of their own life (independently of the body), even as they may be hurt and healed, be diminished and renewed. (HoMe X.403-404)

To this statement Tolkien added a lengthy but significant marginal note:

> If they do not sink below a certain level. Since no *fëa* can be annihilated, reduced to zero or not-existing, it is no[t] clear what is meant. Thus Sauron was *said* to have fallen below the point of ever recovering, though he had previously recovered. What is probably meant is that a 'wicked' spirit be-

comes fixed in a certain desire or ambition, and if it cannot repent then its desire becomes virtually its whole being. But the desire may be wholly beyond the weakness it has fallen to, and it will then be unable to withdraw its attention from the unobtainable desire, even to attend to itself. It will then remain for ever in impotent desire or memory of desire. (HoMe X.407-408)

This passage clarifies two important points about the growth question: 1) disembodied spirits can grow (in game terms, they can recover lost stats and perhaps even enlarge them over time); 2) such recovery or growth does not always take place, due to the spirit's inability to focus on these imperatives (because at the moment of its disembodiment it was too consumed or preoccupied with its own impotence to achieve its desires).

Conceptually, this meshes well with the obstacles already suggested by the earlier passage: deprived of a body, its natural and accustomed "link" to the material world, a spirit requires a focused will to operate effectively in a disembodied state. It is not easy to concentrate on something when one is in pain, and even if a spirit learns to deal with that pain, there are a host of perceptions and emotions which are constantly tempting it to "distraction."

But the remark about the capacity of spirits to grow independently of their body must be taken with a grain of salt. First off, Tolkien explicitly identifies this statement as representing an Elven point of view, and although it is couched in universal terms such that it would, in theory, apply also to the spirits of mortals, it is not made with specific reference to the undead, nor is that the context of the passage in which it appears.

As a statement of the potentiality of spirits under ideal circumstances, it does not factor in the element of compulsion inherent to the condition of undeath. An undead spirit must contend not only with its own inherent flaws and weaknesses, but with the "enforced" distraction of being controlled, directly or indirectly, by an alien will. To this must also be added the implied "serenity" of the statement's Elven perspective: a disembodied Elven spirit, however mangled by the experience, nonetheless remains in its "natural element" within Arda. Its bodilessness may be a grief, but it need hardly be a torment.

Still, the passage holds forth the possibility of some kind of change within an otherwise "changeless" state, given the proper time and conditions. This is good news for role players interested in (or, more likely, confronted with the prospect of playing) an undead character in game. The implicit framework of Tolkien's thinking on the problems involved with spirits in adverse conditions provides both the motive and potential for development.[6]

But what kind of development? Naturally, the bodiless have no hope of exercising (much less improving) abilities and skills that require a body! But there is another side to disembodiment which Tolkien explored in a late essay entitled *"Ósanwe-kenta:* 'Enquiry into the Communication of Thought'" (published in *Vinyar Tengwar* 39; hereafter abbreviated as "OK"). This discusses the factors affecting the possibility of telepathic (as opposed to linguistic) communication in Arda.[7]

Here it is asserted by the Noldorin Loremaster Pengolodh that the capacity for mental communication exists within all minds:

...from the Ainur in the presence of Eru, or the great Valar such as Manwë and Melkor, to the Maiar in Eää, and down to the least of the *Mirröanwi* [Q. "Incarnates;" Men and Elves]. But different states bring in *limitations,* which are not fully controlled by the will.

[....]

The Incarnates have by the nature of *sáma* [Q. "mind"] the same faculties; but their perception is dimmed by the *hröa,* for their *fëa* is united to their *hröa* and its normal procedure is through the *hröa,* which is in itself part of Eä, without thought. The dimming is indeed double; for thought has to pass one mantle of *hröa* and penetrate another. For this reason in Incarnates transmission of thought requires *strengthening* to be effective. (OK.24)

Although the essay makes no mention of the effects of the disembodiment of Incarnates on the functioning of *ósanwe,* the implication is surely present: disembodiment would increase the capacity (or rather reduce the limitations imposed by the "mantle" of the body) for *ósanwe.* It will become clear as we examine Tolkien's further remarks about the apparition of the undead to the living that the metaphysics of *ósanwe* are presumed throughout.[8]

MIND TO MIND

If a person dies in body, "the *fëa* is, as it were, houseless, and it becomes invisible to bodily eyes (though clearly perceptible by direct awareness to other *fëar)* (HoMe X.218; cf. HoMe X.250)." The idea that a disembodied spirit is perceptible only to the mind is expressed at greater length in an unused draft of the "Athrabeth" of Finrod and Andreth:

'Among my folk men speak mostly of the "breath" (or the "breath of life"), and they say that if it leaves the house, it may by seeing eyes be seen as a *wraith,* a shadowy image of the living thing that was.'

'That is but a guess,' said Finrod, 'and long ago we said things similar, but we know now that the Indweller is not the "breath" (which the *hröa* uses), and that seeing eyes cannot see one that is houseless, but that living eyes may draw from the *fëa* within an image which the houseless conveys to the housed: the memory of itself.' (HoMe X.353)

The agent enabling the manifestation of the houseless spirit to other minds (as in OK) is the will (HoMe X.212, 398-399), a faculty which Tolkien defines elsewhere as "the effective link between the indestructible mind and being and the realization of its imagination (Letters.260)."

At first sight all this may seem like unnecessary metaphysical pedantry. Is it not redundant to insist upon the invisibility of the houseless to the bodily eye if, in the event, the houseless are capable of manifesting themselves to the mind's eye with no discernable difference in dramatic effect? In fact, the matter is not so simple. Because the apparition of the undead involves conscious will and intentionality on their part, there is scope for manipulation and deception.

The varieties of manifestation this notion opens up, coupled with the receiving mind's potential for acceptance or resistance, led Tolkien to a number of extremely interesting ideas which cannot, however, be effectively presented in isolation from one another. We present the relevant passages in an order that we hope will increase their mutual intelligibility and coherence. The implications of these ideas for role playing undead are not examined in depth until the passages have all been presented.

The first series of quotations come from "The Notion Club Papers," a transitional work relating to the evolution of the story of Númenor. The setting for the conversa-

tions depicted is a fictional cabal of Oxford dons (modeled upon the real Inklings) called the Notion Club:

'"How can the dreamer distinguish [among the different kinds of images encountered in sleep]?" said Ramer. "Well, it seems to me that the chief divisions are *Perceiving* (free dreams), *Composing and Working,* and *Reading.* Each has a distinctive quality, and confusion is not as a rule likely to occur, while it is going on; though the waking mind may make mistakes about disjointed memories. The divisions can be subdivided, of course. *Perceiving* can be, for instance, either inspections or visits to real scenes; or apparitions, in which one may be deliberately visited by another mind or spirit. *Reading* can be simply going over the records of any experiences, messing about in the mind's library; or it can be perceiving at second hand, using minds, inspecting *their* records. There's a danger there, of course. You might inspect a mind and think you were looking at a record (true in its own terms of things external to you both), when it was really the other mind's composition, *fiction.* There's *lying* in the universe, some very clever lying. I mean, some very potent fiction is specially composed to be inspected by others and to deceive, to pass as record; but it is made for the malefit of Men. If men already lean to lies, or have thrust aside the guardians, they may read some very maleficial stuff. It seems that they do."' (HoMeIX.195-196)

The capacity for an apparition to convey more (or less) than a "true" image is now expanded to include its potential for emotional impact (in particular, terror) on the living:

'Aren't some of the visitors malicious?' said Jeremy. 'Don't evil minds attack you ever in sleep?' 'I expect so,' said Ramer. 'They're always on the watch, asleep or awake. But they work more by deceit than attack. I don't think they are specially active in sleep. Less so, probably. I fancy they find it easier to get at us awake, distracted and not so aware. The body's a wonderful lever for an indirect influence on the mind, and deep dreams can be very remote from its disturbance. Anyway, I've very little experience of that kind - thank God! But there does come sometimes a frightening...a sort of knocking at the door: it doesn't describe it, but that'll have to do. I think that is one of the ways in -which that horrible sense of *fear* arises: a fear that doesn't seem to reside in the remembered dream-situation at all, or wildly exceeds it.' (HoMe IX. 196-197)

Some say that the Houseless desire bodies, though they are not willing to seek them lawfully...

We now move onto a more direct assertion of the principle of *ósanwe* as it relates to spirits. The discussion opens with the concept of "voiceless" (i.e., non-linguistic) communication:

'But spirits are often recorded as *speaking,'* said Frankley.

'I know,' Ramer answered. 'But I wonder if they really do, or if they make you hear them, just as they can also make you see them in some appropriate form, by producing a direct impression on the mind. The clothing of this naked impression in terms intelligible to your incarnate mind is, I imagine, often left to you, the receiver. Though no doubt they can cause you to hear words and to see shapes of their own choosing, if they will. But in any case the process would be the reverse of the normal in a way, outwards, a translation from meaning into symbol.[9] The audible and visible results might be hardly distinguishable from the normal, even so, except for some inner emotion; though there is, in fact, sometimes a perceptible difference of sequence.'

'I don't know what spirits can do,' said Lowdham; 'but I don't see why they cannot make actual sounds.. .cause the air to vibrate appropriately, if they wish. They seem able to affect "matter" directly.'

'I dare say they can,' said Ramer. 'But I doubt if they would wish to, for such a purpose. Communication with another mind is simpler otherwise. And the direct attack seems to me to account better for the feelings of human beings often have on such occasions. There is often a shock, a sense of being touched in the quick. There is movement from within outwards, even if one feels that the cause is outside, something other, not you. It is quite different in quality from the reception of sound inwards, even though it may well happen that the thing communicated directly is not strange or alarming, while many things said in the ordinary incarnate fashion are tremendous.' [....]

'You make it all sound like hallucination,' said Frankley.

'But of course,' said Ramer. 'They work in a similar way. If you are thinking of diseased conditions, then you may believe that the cause is nothing external; and all the same something (even if it is only some department of the body) must be affecting the mind and making it translate outwards. If you believe in possession or the attack of evil spirits, then there is no difference in process, only the difference between malice and good-will, lying and truth. There is Disease and Lying in the world, and not only among men.' (HoMe IX.202-203)

Returning now to Arda proper, we find that many of these same ideas are taken up or echoed in Tolkien's account of houseless Elven spirits:

But it would seem that in these after-days more and more of the Elves, be they of the Eldalië in origin or be they of other kinds, who linger in Middle-earth now refuse the summons of Mandos, and wander houseless in the world, unwilling to leave it and unable to inhabit it, haunting trees or springs or hidden places that once they knew. Not all of these are kindly or unstained by the Shadow. Indeed the refusal of the summons is in itself a sign of taint.

It is therefore a foolish and perilous thing, besides being a wrong deed forbidden justly by the appointed Rulers of Arda, if the Living seek to commune with the Unbodied, though the houseless may desire it, especially the most unworthy among them. For the Unbodied, wandering in the world, are those who at the least have refused the door of life and remain in regret and self-pity. Some are filled with bitterness, grievance, and envy. Some were enslaved by the Dark Lord and do his work still, though he himself is gone. They will not speak truth or wisdom. To call on them is folly. To attempt to master them and to make them servants of one's own will is wickedness. Such practices are of Morgoth; and the necromancers are of the host of Sauron his servant.

Some say that the Houseless desire bodies, though they are not willing to seek them lawfully by submission to the judgement of Mandos. The wicked among them will take bodies, if they can, unlawfully. The peril of communing with them is therefore, not only the peril of being deluded by fantasies or lies: there is peril also of destruction. For

one of the hungry Houseless, if it is admitted to the friendship of the Living, may seek to eject the *fëa* from its body; and in the contest for mastery the body may be gravely injured, even if it be not wrested from its rightful habitant. Or the Houseless may plead for shelter, and if it is admitted, then it will seek to enslave its host and use both his will and his body for its own purposes. It is said that Sauron did these things, and taught his followers how to achieve them. (HoMe X.223-224)

Although it is the Elven houseless that are spoken of here, it may be surmised that violent possession of a living body lies within the compass of the mortal undead as well. This passage is immediately followed by an extended comment by Ælfwine which posits an extremely significant distinction between (malevolent) disembodied Elves and Elves who have "faded" in the wearing of time, which he names the Lingerers:

Moreover, the Lingerers are not houseless, though they may seem to be. They do not desire bodies, neither do they seek shelter, nor strive for mastery over body or mind. Indeed they do not seek converse with Men at all, save maybe rarely, either for the doing of some good, or because they perceive in a Man's spirit some love of things ancient and fair. Then they may reveal to him their forms (though his mind working outwardly, maybe), and he will behold them in their beauty. Of such he may have no fear, though he may feel awe of them. For the Houseless have no forms to reveal, and even if it were within their power (as some Men say) to counterfeit Elvish forms, deluding the minds of Men with fantasies, such visions would be marred by the evil of their intent. For the hearts of true Men uprise in joy to behold the true likenesses of the Firstborn, their elder kindred; and this joy nothing evil can counterfeit. (HoMe X.224-225)

> ...and the fear that they inspire, is enormously increased in *∂arkneꙅꙅ*...

The paradoxical status of the Lingerers (who retain "forms" which, though invisible, can nevertheless somehow be "revealed") is more fully, though perhaps not much more clearly, articulated in a hastily written note associated with the "Athrabeth:"

Memory by a *fëa* of experience is evidently powerful, vivid, and complete. So the underlying conception is that "matter" will be taken up into "spirit", by becoming part of its *knowleↄge* - and so rendered timeless and under the spirit's command. As the Elves remaining in Middle-earth slowly "consumed" their bodies - or made them into remnants of memory? The resurrection of the body (at least as far as Elves were concerned) was in a sense incorporeal. But while it could pass physical barriers at will, it could at will oppose a barrier to matter. If you touched a resurrected body you felt it. Or if it willed it could simply elude you - disappear. Its position in space was at will. (HoMe X.364)

Great care must be exercised in extrapolating anything from this statement for the mortal undead, but one point seems to us a valid observation. The chief difference between the manifestation of a faded spirit from one that has been disembodied is the retention of a kind of semi-corporeality by the former ("it could at will oppose a barrier to matter"). If this power is to be associated with the process of "fading" as such, it may be the key to explaining, within Tolkien's metaphysical framework, how the Ringwraiths could interact with the material world - wield physical weapons, ride horses, wear clothing "to give shape to their nothingness (LotR 1.234)." Could it be that the peculiar "embalming" quality of the Rings of Power (which, as we have seen above, is a manifestation of the Elven motive of "clinging to Time" within Middle-earth) produced an effect similar (though by no means identical) to that experienced by the faded Lingerers?[10]

If this interpretation is valid, it would follow that other undead lack this ability because they are truly disembodied, not faded. For them, the only means of "affecting matter directly" (as distinct from impacting another mind through ósanwe) would be violent possession as described in the passage about the Houseless quoted above. Indeed this conclusion would seem inevitable in the light of Legolas' statement that he had no fear of the Oathbreakers, "powerless and frail as I deemed them (LotR III.150)."[11]

This brings us back to the question of how undead inspire fear in the living, and why Elves are impervious to such fear (LotR 111.59). Tolkien seems never to have addressed the first question, perhaps because it was such a taken for granted characteristic of undead in his imagination.[12] In one letter he writes of the Ringwraiths: "Their peril is almost entirely due to the unreasoning *fear* which they inspire (like ghosts). They have no great physical power against the fearless; but what they have, and the fear that they inspire, is enormously increased in *∂arkneꙅꙅ* (Letters.272; cf. UT.338, 344)."[13]

As for the second question, why Elves have no fear of the undead, no explicit reason is given, but several might be deduced. Since this characteristic seems to be shared by all Elves (by a Wood-elf like Legolas as much as by one like Glorfindel who has seen the Undying Lands), the answer must be sought in what distinguishes them *aꙅ a race* from Men. The solution is not long in coming:

Indeed in their early days death came more readily; for their bodies were then less different from the bodies of Men, and the command of their spirits over their bodies less complete. This command was, nonetheless, at all times greater than it has ever been among Men. From their beginnings the chief difference between Elves and Men lay in the fate and nature of their spirits. The *fëar* of the Elves were destined to dwell in Arda for all the life of Arda, and the death of the flesh did not abrogate that destiny. Their *fëar* were tenacious therefore of life 'in the raiment of Arda', and far excelled the spirits of Men in power over that 'raiment', even from the first days protecting their bodies from many ills and assaults (such as disease), and healing them swiftly from injuries, so that they recovered from wounds that would have proved fatal to Men. (HoMe X.218-219)

A similar statement is made by Pengolodh that correlates this notion more directly with the operations of *ósanwe:* "Men have the same faculty as the Quendi, but it is in itself weaker, and is weaker in operation owing to the strength of the *hröa,* over which most men have small control by the will (OK.23)." Note the centrality of Aragorn's exceptional strength of *will* in the Grey Company's passage of the Paths of the Dead (LotR 111.60, 63, 150).

There is one final possibility, entirely hypothetical but quite plausible, to consider with regard to the issue of whether disembodied spirits as such are capable of directly affecting the physical world, and that is what Tolkien calls the "Morgoth-

element" (HoMe X.400). Tolkien conceived this as the infiltration of Morgoth's energy throughout all matter in Arda, living and inorganic alike, such that "the whole of 'Middle-earth' was Morgoth's Ring *(ibid)*."

This element affected all incarnate spirits, such that it could be argued that, even after a spirit became disembodied, it would still maintain a potential link between itself and the material world by virtue of the presence of the Morgoth-element in both. In theory, then, any undead spirit could work sorcerous effects upon matter by activating that link. To do so, however, might gradually render the spirit more vulnerable to the will of Sauron. Consider the following:

> The *fëa* is single, and in the last impregnable. It cannot be brought to Mandos. It is summoned; and the summons proceeds from just authority, and is imperative; yet it may be refused....It was less frequent, however, in ancient days, while Morgoth was in Arda, or his servant Sauron after him; for then the *fëa* unbodied would flee in terror of the Shadow to any refuge unless it were already committed to the Darkness and passed then into its dominion. In like manner even of the Eldar some who had become corrupted refused the summons, and then had little power to resist the counter-summons of Morgoth. (HoMe X.223)

Granted it is Elven, not mortal, spirits that are being discussed here. Elsewhere Tolkien writes that mortal spirits were summoned "without choice in the matter: their free will with regard to death was taken away (HoMe X.340)." But the idea of gradually "committing" oneself to Darkness by wielding the Morgoth-element - even as a disembodied spirit - seems at least a possibility.

Of course, this is a moot point for Ringwraiths or any undead brought into being by Sauron's machinations; but the case of the Oathbreakers is rather different, since their undead state came about through the agency of a "good" character. Perhaps even some of the Oathbreakers (during the 3,000-odd years they were waiting for the

Corpse-Candle **Swamp Star**

DENIZENS OF THE DEAD MARSHES

Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novate, CA 94948, USA
(chrisl224@aol.com)

The first MERP release to feature a wide variety of undead creatures was the 1984 module Dagorlad and the Dead Marshes. Although Mithril never created a separate range of miniatures for that module, the much later "Ancient Folk" range included at least one figure whose name certainly derives from it: the Swamp Star (M253). The other Ancient Folk figure relating to the Dead Marshes, though not invented by the author of Dagorlad, is the Corpse Candle (M250). A final undead type which first makes its appearance in the MERP series through Dagorlad but is not to be found in Tolkien's own writings is the ghoul. Ghouls are not represented in the Ancient Folk range, but are included in the range designed the accompany the Ghost Warriors module (M168).

Swamp stars and corpse candles lure mortals to their doom by the beguiling light which they exude – "the tricksy lights," as Gollum called them. Whether these are truly unquiet shades or merely malevolent spirits remains a dark mystery that few are minded to probe. Corpse candles are so called because their lights always manifest themselves in proximity to the physical remains of the dead, and have the power to give those remains a semblance of wholeness. The most potent corpse candles, sometimes called corpse lanterns, are capable, it would seem, of actually animating dead remains and, in theeyes of some victims, even appear fair and living.

Swamp stars lack such powers of illusionary manifestation, but what they lose in potency they make up for in mobility (not reliant upon the presence of physical carnage to work their wiles, and perfectly capable of leading their prey into some deadly bog or pathless mire). To the naked eye, a swamp star appears as nothing more than a bobbing point of light, a "will-o'-the-wisp," as some say. Yet it is said that those with spirit-vision, or those who see with the eyes of death, looking upon a swamp star, would behold an infernal shape bearing aloft a pale lantern, cloaked and skeletal, even as the grave-ghosts of the Barrow-downs.

Unlike the phantom forms of swamp stars and corpse candles, and of quite a different order than the artificially possessed bodies of the barrow-wights, ghouls are starkly corporeal. Mortal death by definition involves the severing of a spirit from its body, and for this reason ghouls can only come about by some external intervention of fate or sorcery. The one advantage (if such it can be called) which ghouls enjoy over other undead is their continued ability to directly interact with the material world. For example, they can wield physical weapons, albeit less nimbly than in life, and theircontinued occupation of their mortal form enables them to coordinate body and spirit more effortlessly than any artificial possession. For the most part, however, ghouls lack the capacity to tip this factor in their favor, since they are bestial in mind, driven only by blind hate and an insatiable hunger for the flesh of the living.

The figures featured on this page and many others in the Mithril series can be obtained from Time Machine Miniatures. Contact Jim Corless for details:

52 Larch Avenue, Dumont, NJ 07628, USA
(timemaccor@aol.com).

Ghoul

heir of Isildur to summon them) might have committed themselves to Darkness through the temptation to affect the physical world by means of the Morgoth-element, and so might have been prevented from aiding Aragorn because of Sauron's "counter-summons." For his part, Sauron would certainly have been aware of this possibility, and so would have endeavored to cultivate it.

DEVISING UNDEATH

The dictum that mortals, unlike Elves, cannot of their own volition remain disembodied in Arda raises the question: what is necessary to bring about a state of undeath? Of course, the *circumstances* that occasioned the emergence of the Ringwraiths and Oathbreakers are well-known, but the actual *mechanisms* underlying those events remain obscure. By what means did Sauron endow the One Ring with the power to prevent the spirits of the Nine from departing the world? Or how were the words of a mere mortal, albeit one of heroic stature, able to alter to destiny of an entire people contrary to their created mortal nature?

The answer to the first question is most likely the Morgoth-element. "It was this Morgoth-element in matter, indeed," writes Tolkien, "which was a prerequisite for such 'magic' and other evils as Sauron practiced with it and upon it (HoMe X.400)." Sauron makes his first appearance in the legendarium as "a sorcerer of dreadful power, master of shadows and of phantoms, foul in wisdom, cruel in strength, misshaping what he touched, twisting what he ruled, lord of werewolves (Sil.156)." Werewolves, it will be remembered, are "fell beasts inhabited by dreadful spirits that [Sauron] had imprisoned in their bodies (Sil.164)," and regardless of the origin of these spirits - mortal, Elven, or divine – Sauron's ability to coerce them against their will (and perhaps against their nature) makes this the paradigmatic operation of sorcery.[14]

Surely, then, it is the Morgoth-element, with its ability to affect spirits through the "matter" in which they dwell, and the mastery of the Morgoth-element which sorcery teaches, that provides the actual mechanism for Sauron to make his will effective with regard to the Ringwraiths.[15] The same idea undoubtedly underlies the Morgul-knives, which, though clearly "physical," dissolve in sunlight (LotR 1.210). Perhaps the blades of these weapons were sorcerously-produced coalescences of the Morgoth-element. At any rate, the Morgul-knives represent the sole example of an actual mechanism for inducing undeath:

'They tried to pierce you with a Morgul-knife which remains in the wound. If they had succeeded, you would have become like they are, only weaker and under their command. You would have become a wraith under the dominion of the Dark Lord (LotR 1.234)."

The doom of the Oathbreakers, on the other hand, seems wholly unrelated to the machinations of the Dark Lord. Setting aside Isildur (who need not be supposed to have been the actual source for the power of the words he uttered), there seem to be two possible explanations for the efficacy of the curse: 1) some power latent in the Stone of Erech, upon which the oath had been sworn, and 2) divine intervention, either directly from Eru or mediately through the Valar. Since Tolkien says nothing about the stone's origin (other than that Isildur brought it from Númenor), we can only speculate about its possible significance. But even were its history known, it is inconceivable that a mere object, in and of itself, could produce such an effect except insofar as it served as a focus for some higher authority.[16]

By what means did Sauron endow the One Ring with the power to prevent the spirits of the Nine from departing the world?

For what purpose would Eru or the Valar sanction so horrific a purgatory for an entire race - apparently effective against even the children of the actual Oathbreakers? A suitable beginning from which to explore this inscrutable mystery may lie in the words of Gimli:

'Strange and wonderful I thought it that the designs of Mordor should be overthrown by such wraiths of fear and darkness. With its own weapons was it worsted!' (LotR III. 152)

This insight echoes the thought of Eru himself in his primordial declaration of theodicy:

Then Ilúvatar spoke, and he said: 'Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Ilúvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.' (Sil.17)

On this interpretation, the undeath that followed in consequence of the oathbreaking was a providential arrangement designed to aid the Free Peoples in the War of the Ring. The prophetic connection of the two events is manifest in the words of Isildur's curse: "For this war will last through years uncounted, and you shall be summoned once again ere the end (LotR 111.55)."

Of course, such an explanation is possible only in retrospect, and, as it were, when viewed "from above." It would certainly not have been very comforting for those who had to endure 3,000 years of bodiless torment, and still less for the descendants of the Oath-breakers, who had to live out their lives in the shadow of that impending doom. Such a situation offers rich soil for a GM to cultivate all manner of dark drama and soul-searching for his or her campaign, not to mention a powerful plot engine.

THE EYES OF DEATH

If the bodiless are invisible to the naked eye, the logical corollary, that the bodiless cannot perceive the physical world as the living do, must also be true. Tolkien takes up this very point in Merry's question to Aragorn on Weathertop:

'Can the Riders *see*?' asked Merry. 'I mean, they seem usually to have used their noses rather than their eyes, smelling for us, if smelling is the right word, at least in the daylight. But you made us lie down flat when you saw them down below; and now you talk of being seen, if we move.'

'I was too careless on the hill-top,' answered Strider. '....They themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys; and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us: then they are most to be feared. And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it.

Senses, too, there are other than sight or smell. We can feel their presence - it troubled our hearts, as soon as we came here, and before we saw them; they feel ours more keenly.' (LotR 1.202)

This passage poses a number of interesting questions. What is it about light (and more specifically the sun's light) that obscures the Ringwraiths' perception of other living beings, even if they can otherwise feel their presence? And what, practically speaking, is the difference between "seeing," "smelling" and "feeling" to creatures that, according to the *ósanwe* principle, possess only a single perceptive "organ" (the mind or *fëa*)?

Such problems cannot be solved on the basis of a single narrative passage like this, but comparison with other descriptions of the "wraith-world" may move us towards greater clarity on some points. Happily, *The Lord of the Rings* contains several episodes in which the Ringbearer (Frodo or Sam) puts on the Ring. As Gandalf explains at Rivendell, "You were in gravest peril while you wore the Ring, for then you were half in the wraith-world yourself (LotR 1.234; cf. Letters.330-331)." To some extent, then, the Ring allows its wearer to see the world as the Ringwraiths do, and for that reason these passages are of the greatest interest for understanding how the undead perceive and experience the world around them.

The first glimpse of the wraith-world takes place when Frodo dons the Ring at night on Weathertop:

Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes became terribly clear. He was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him. Desperate, he drew his own sword, and it seemed to him that it flickered red, as if it was a firebrand. Two of the figures halted. The third was taller than the others: his hair was long and gleaming and on his helm was a crown. In one hand he held a long sword, and in the other a knife; both the knife and the hand that held it glowed with a pale light. (LotR 1.208)

It should be kept in mind that at least some of the Ringwraiths' gear is physical (their weapons, certainly, and perhaps also their helms and inner robes). This, and the red glow of Frodo's blade, indicate that some color spectrum exists in the wraith-world, and this seems not to depend entirely upon natural illumination of sun or moon.[17] Rather the most potent elements in the field of vision (Frodo's sword and the Witch-king's Morgul-knife) glow of their own accord.[18]

It is noteworthy that during Frodo's race to the Ford of Bruinen (which takes place under the light of day and without the assistance of the Ring) his pursuers appear to him in largely the same detail as they did on Weathertop (LotR 1.226). Having nearly succumbed to the effect of the Morgul-knife, Frodo could see the wraiths with perfect clarity in spite of the time of day, whereas the noon sun destroys the shapes of the living.

After Frodo crosses the ford and the flood is unleashed upon the Ringwraiths, Frodo sees, "beyond the Riders that hesitated on the shore, a shining figure of white light; and behind it ran small shadowy forms waving flames, that flared red in the grey mist that was falling over the world (LotR 1.227)." Later, in Rivendell, Gandalf explains to Frodo that the shining figure he saw was Glorfindel "as he is upon the other side: one of the mighty of the Firstborn (LotR 1.235)." This motif is elucidated more clearly in the B typescript of Tolkien's "Laws and Customs among the Eldar:"

....the Eldar do not confound the breath of the body with the spirit. This they call, as hath been seen, *fëar* or *fairë,* of which the ancient significance seems to be rather 'radiance'. For though the *fëa* in itself is not visible to bodily eyes, it is in light that the Eldar find the most fitting symbol in bodily terms of the indwelling spirit, 'the light of the house' or *cöacalina* as they also name it. And those in whom the *fëa* is strong and untainted, they say, appear even to mortal eyes to shine at times translucent (albeit faintly) as though a lamp burned within. (HoMe X.250)

The "symbolic" quality of the *fairë* need not contradict the actual perception of such radiance as a "real" phenomenon. Recall Ramer's theory that a mind must "translate" the "naked impressions" of another mind into symbol (p. 9). At any rate, it is clear that exceptionally strong spirits will "stand out" conspicuously in the wraith-world,[19] while others - even one as noble as Aragorn - will appear, like the Hobbits, as "small shadowy forms," devoid of any marks of individuality, indeed less striking even than the light of the torches they bear.

The next relevant passage appears during the Fellowship's journey through Moria:

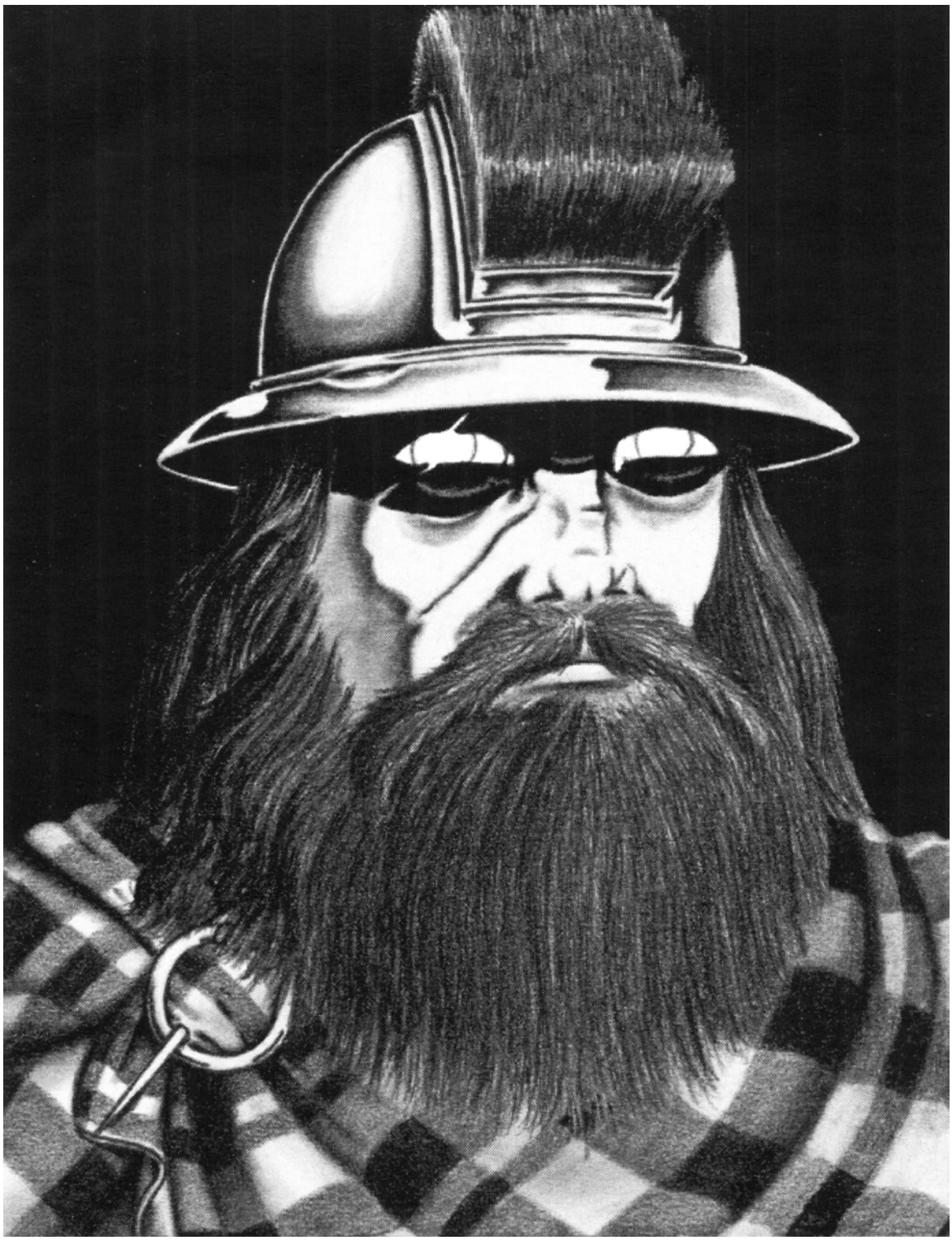
....now a deep uneasiness, growing to dread, crept over [Frodo] again. Though he had been healed in Rivendell of the knife-stroke, that grim wound had not been without effect. His senses were sharper and more aware of things that could not be seen. One sign of change that he soon had noticed was that he could see more in the dark than any of his companions, save perhaps Gandalf....He felt the certainty of evil ahead and of evil following; but he said nothing. (LotR 1.325)

Here we see a reiteration both of Aragorn's statement that the denizens of the wraith-world feel the presence of other beings more keenly than the living, and the *ósanwe* principle that minds unfettered by the body perceive other minds "directly." Thus Frodo can sense the evil intent of Gollum's mind following him and the evil of the Orcs/Balrog ahead. And again there appears the motif of seeing better in darkness than light.

The last major window onto the wraith-world[20] is opened when Sam puts on the Ring to hide from the Orcs of Cirith Ungol:

The world changed, and a single moment of time was filled with an hour of thought. At once he was aware that hearing was sharpened while sight was dimmed, but otherwise than in Shelob's lair. All things about him now were not dark but vague; while he himself was there in a grey hazy world, alone, like a small black solid rock, and the Ring, weighing down his left hand, was like an orb of hot gold.

He did not feel invisible at all, but horribly and uniquely visible; and he knew that somewhere an Eye was searching for him. He heard the crack of stone, and the murmur of water far off in Morgul Vale; and down away under the rock the bubbling misery of Shelob, groping, lost in some blind passage; and voices in the dungeons of the tower; and the cries of the Orcs as they came out of the tunnel; and deafening, roaring to his ears, the crash of the feet and the rending clamour of the Orcs before him. He shrank against the cliff. But they marched up like a phantom company, grey distorted figures in a mist, only dreams of fear with pale flames in their hands. [....]



He listened....and he understood what they said. Perhaps the Ring gave understanding of tongues, or simply understanding, especially of the servants of Sauron its maker, so that if he gave heed, he understood and translated the thought to himself. (LotR 11.343-344)

A textbook case of *ósanwe.* Partially loosened from the limitations of his *hröa,* Sam's *fëa* is suddenly overloaded with sensory "noise" that disembodied *fëar* encounter as interpretable information. If he chooses to bend his will in a particular direction, he can translate that noise into understanding. Again noteworthy is the utterly nondescript blur produced by mundane living beings, though they pass him by in extreme physical proximity, and Sam's ability to sense Sauron's presence and searching will.

What can be concluded from these partial glimpses of the wraith-world? Perhaps the best one-line summary comes from Sam, who describes movement in that world as "blundering through a fog (LotR III. 175)." The bodiless perceive all things, both living and inanimate, as indeterminate shadowy shapes. If, on the other hand, the disembodied mind seeks to manifest itself to another mind (as the Ringwraiths do on Weathertop) the receiving mind is capable of trans-

lating their forms with great detail. Only persons and objects of exceptional power will differentiate themselves amid the deadening "sameness" of the wraith-world. Yet even if other minds are seen only dimly, their presence and disposition can be felt at great distances.[21]

Light clearly has a profound impact on the wraith-world, as even mundane torches are more illuminative than most incarnate spirits. Aragorn's image of the living casting shadows in the minds of the Ringwraiths may be a better way of explaining the process than most; but if a living being casts a shadow, whence comes the source of illumination generating that shadow? Certainly not daylight, since that prevents shadows from appearing. Nor perhaps not the one seen, since a powerful person like Glorfindel appears not as a shadow but as a light of his own.

The metaphor would seem rather to imply that the "illumination" producing the shadows comes from the bodiless mind as it searches, so that, when confronted with a more potent source of illumination (like the sun), their vision is obstructed. In daytime the wraith-world is not less but more impenetrable because the *fairë* of the sun drowns out any other *fairë* from discerning differences between things.[22] Essentially, daylight blinds the undead, forcing them to rely on the bare power of their *fëa* to "feel" rather than "see" the presence of other *fëar*. Hence the Ringwraiths increase their ability to search by day with the eyes of their horses (LotR 1.202).

In a brief but interesting note to "The Hunt for the Ring," Tolkien explained that the Ringwraith that appeared at the Brandywine ferry "was well aware that the Ring had crossed the river; but the river was a barrier to his sense of its movement (UT.344)." Apparently, then, water (or at any rate large amounts of it) can obstruct the perception of the undead. This confirms the distinction between "feeling" (generalized premonition) and "seeing" (directed perception) posited above.

There is one other mode of perception which seems to be associated with death, and that is prophecy or foresight. This is a quality evinced not by the Ringwraiths but by the Oathbreakers:

'Yet it is said in Harrowdale,' said Éowyn in a low voice, 'that in the moonless nights but little while ago a great host in strange array passed by. Whence they came none knew, but they went up the stony road and vanished into the hill, as if they went to keep a tryst.' (LotR 111.70)

This allusion to the gathering of the Dead at the Stone of Erech is significant because of its chronology. Aragorn summoned the Dead on a night of the full moon (LotR 111.52; cf. 374), but Éowyn's report implies that the Dead were already aware of the impending tryst "in the moonless nights" - before Aragorn had even resolved to enter the Paths. This agrees with Théoden's remark that "the Dead come seldom forth and only at times of great unquiet and *coming* death (LotR III.70; my emphasis)." The Oathbreakers possess some kind of foreknowledge.

The relation of death and foresight (or at least the dramatic appropriateness of their association) is seen in Huor's final words to Turgon in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears:

'Go now, lord, while time is! For in you lives the last hope of the Eldar, and while Gondolin stands Morgoth shall still know fear in his heart.'

But Turgon answered: 'Not long now can Gondolin be hidden; and being discovered it must fall.'

Then Huor spoke and said: 'Yet if it stands but a little while, then out of your house shall come the hope of Elves and Men. This I say to you, lord, with the eyes of death...' (Sil.194)

Admittedly two quite different situations, but the motif of foresight - perhaps even prophetic foresight - is present in both. Pengolodh distinguishes between "*Foresight* which is prevision [granted by Eru or the Valar], and *forecasting* which is opinion made by reasoning upon present evidence (OK.25; cf. 31 Note 6)." Yet even if the premonitions of the Oathbreakers are only "forecasts" of ominous events, their guesses must rest to a large degree on the mysterious powers of the disembodied mind with its heightened senses and its ability to mark and interpret signs invisible to the living.[23]

VULNERABILITY

For all the invulnerability to physical harm that bodilessness implies, the undead nonetheless feel fear in the face of certain elements. Fire, for instance: "There is little shelter or defence here, but fire shall serve for both. Sauron can put fire to his evil uses, as he can all things, but these Riders do not love it, and fear those who wield it (LotR I.202)." Though it is not entirely clear from the narrative, Tolkien also represents the Ringwraiths as fearful of water: "At the Ford of Bruinen only the Witch-king and two others, with the lure of the Ring straight before them, had dared to enter the river; the others were driven into it by Glorfindel and Aragorn (UT.353)."[24]

The fear of fire is perplexing, apart from its possible obstruction of vision at close range and the prospect of getting their material garb incinerated. Perhaps there is a "mythological" connection between mundane fire and the light of Arien, the sun, but that may have more to do with the Ringwraiths' role as minions of evil than with their undead status as such.[25] The mythological significance of water, on the other hand, is assured, since "the Elves say that the spirit of Ulmo runs in all the veins of the world (Sil.27)." Tolkien expands upon this association in a more revealing metaphysical vein:

It is quite possible, of course, that certain 'elements' or conditions of matter had attracted Morgoth's special attention (mainly, unless in the remote past, for reasons of his own plans). For example, all gold (in Middle-earth) seems to have had a specially 'evil' trend - but not silver. Water is represented as being almost entirely free of Morgoth. (This, of course, does not mean that any particular sea, stream, river, well, or even vessel of water could not be poisoned or defiled - as all things could.) (HoMe X.400-401)

In light of this, it may be thought that fire and water are not only exceptionally free of the Morgoth-element, but in fact inimical to it and to creatures imbued with it because they are peculiarly endowed with the *fairë* of Arien and Ulmo respectively, two of Morgoth's greatest enemies. On the other hand, what is harmful to Ringwraiths may only be an annoyance to undead unconnected with Morgoth/Sauron. For the Oathbreakers, fire and water may simply be barriers to perception because of their powerful *fairë*.

MOBILITY

When Legolas recounts the ride of the Grey Company to Pippin and Merry at Minas Tirith, he describes the Dead thus:

'Some I saw riding, some striding, yet all moving with the same great speed. Silent

they were, but there was a gleam in their eyes. In the uplands of Lamedon they overtook our horses, and swept round us, and would have passed us by, if Aragorn had not forbidden them.' (LotR III.151)

During the ride itself, Legolas beheld "shapes of Men and of horses, and pale banners like shreds of cloud, and spears like winter-thickets on a misty night (LotR 111.61-62)." At the battle of Pelargir, Gimli reports that the Dead "passed over the water" to the enemy ships anchored in the river (LotR III.152).

All three of these passages raise the issue of locomotion: how do the bodiless move? By "how" is meant not "whether" but "in what way(s)." And what does it mean - is it even possible - for a non-physical entity to be bounded or defined by physical space?

But formidable limitations do exist, and these cannot be overcome with „magic" as they might for incarnates.

The matter is complicated by the nature of *ósanwe,* which in principle is unaffected by *distance.* A disembodied mind might conceivably manifest its thoughts or an image of itself to an embodied mind some distance away while remaining located (if "located" is the right word for it) elsewhere.

But formidable limitations do exist, and these cannot be overcome with "magic" as they might for incarnates.

One consideration in the case of the Oathbreakers is the purpose of their movement - not merely to commune with the living, but to attack them.[26] This, it may be thought, required or was enhanced by spatial proximity with the foe. A similar line of thought is indirectly glimpsed in Tolkien's thinking on the power of Sauron:

In the contest with the Palantir Aragorn was the rightful owner. Also the contest took place at a distance, and in a tale which allows the incarnation of great spirits in a physical and destructible form their power must be far greater when actually physically present. (Letters.332)

Legolas draws attention to the great speed with which the Dead travel faster than mundane horses.[27] It may be, as Tolkien writes, that the position in space of the Lingerers was "at will," but the context of that statement is the variable *solidity* of the pseudo-body, and need not imply any notion of teleportation. The Dead, even if bodiless, remain within the world of time and space, and must (even as the mightiest of the Valar) be in some degree subject to its rules. But not the same rules that apply to the incarnate, it seems, since the Oathbreakers are capable of passing over water, something the Ringwraiths, even unclad, were apparently unable to do unaided (UT.344).

CONCLUSION

The array of powers with which Tolkien imbues the undead exposes one of the great weaknesses of the MERP magic system: its artificiality. The MERP spell lists represent the supernatural realm as a series of prescribed effects whose mechanism must be learned as a matter of lore. For Tolkien, by contrast, "magic" is a largely undefined potentiality residing with the naturally occurring, inherent powers of the mind, limited not by profession but by the mind's relationship to its body.

The disembodied spirit finds itself thrust into a new world where many powers that once seemed magical are as natural as thinking or speaking are to the incarnate. There is no need for any artificial apparatus like spell lists to work its will. Its powers are now a direct expression of its essential being - its Intelligence, its Intuition, its Presence - just as Strength, Agility, and Constitution are for the living.

But formidable limitations do exist, and these cannot be overcome with "magic" as they might for incarnates. The bodiless cannot affect the physical world, only other minds. The only way to impact matter is by unlawfully occupying another living body (resulting in great harm to the victim, most likely death) and coercing it to do one's bidding, or by exercising one's will upon the Morgoth-element and thus committing oneself to the Darkness and *its* will.

And there is blindness as well as sight in the wraith-world. There are elements that render the senses helpless, and their effect cannot be eluded unless Arien and Ulmo are themselves banished from Arda. There are also blindnesses of the soul, illnesses caused by the unnatural state of the disembodied, and against these the mind must wage a constant battle for self-preservation. In the long torment of years, one's greatest enemy may be oneself.

In spite of all this adversity - indeed perhaps even because of it - undeath offers a new and still largely unexplored frontier of role playing in Tolkien's world.

NOTES

1. Early versions of the Túrin cycle contained a number of apparitions, but these were ultimately rejected by Tolkien (HoMe II.110, 113, 115; HoMe III.64-65).
2. The MERP series has traditionally treated werewolves in the category of undead, though without any clear justification (CoMe.130). This notion certainly has no basis in real-world folklore about werewolves, because traditionally a man afflicted with lycanthropy who dies becomes a vampire, and so is no longer a werewolf (Montague Summers *The Werewolf* London: Kegan Paul, 1933, pp. 15-16). The wolf attack on the Fellowship beneath Caradhras is sometimes interpreted as an apparition of undead creatures, since their corpses are nowhere to be seen at dawn, but it must be remembered that these wolves had been struck by a powerful spell whose avowed purpose was to annihilate werewolves *(Naur dan i nGaurhoth;* LotR 1.312).
3. The Witch-king is the only character in The Lord of the Rings-or indeed in any of Tolkien's writings-who actually receives the appellation "undead" (LotR III.116).
4. The image derives, of course, from Bilbo's speech to Gandalf before surrendering the Ring: 'I am old Gandalf. I don't look it, but I am beginning to feel it in my heart of hearts. *Well-preserved* indeed!' he snorted. Why, I feel all thin, sort of *stretched,* if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. That can't be right.' (LotR I.41; cf. HoMe VI.79, 233, 235, 239, 265, 266 and HoMe VII.22 for the historical development of this passage).
5. The status of disembodied Elves is treated more fully in our discussion of possession (p. 9-10) and of Elven "fading" (p. 10).
6. The relationship between growth and focused willpower is nicely expressed by Tolkien (in an entirely different context) thus: "I think that comparison [of human life] with a seed is more illuminating: a seed with its innate vitality and heredity, its capacity to grow and develop. A great part of the 'changes' in a man are no doubt unfoldings of the patterns hidden in the seed; though these are of course modified by the situation (geographical or climatic) into which it is thrown, and may be damaged by terrestrial accidents. But this comparison leaves out inevitably an important point. A man is not only a seed, developing in a defined pattern, well or ill according to its situation or its defects as an example of its species; a man is both a seed and in some degree also a gardener, for good or ill. I am impressed by the degree in which the development of 'character' *can* be a product of conscious intention, the will to modify innate tendencies in desired directions; in some cases the change can be great and permanent (Letters.240)."
7. An example of *ósanwe* (Q. "thought-joining") is found in the scene marking the departure of Galadriel and Celeborn during the homeward journey in *The Return of the King:* "Here now for seven days they tarried, for the time was at hand for another parting which they were loth

to make. Soon Celeborn and Galadriel and their folk would turn eastward, and so pass by the Redhorn Gate and down the Dimrill Stair to the Silverlode and to their own country. They had journeyed thus far by the west-ways, for they had much to speak of with Elrond and with Gandalf, and here they lingered still in converse with their friends. Often long after the hobbits were wrapped in sleep they would sit together under the stars, recalling the ages that were gone and all their joys and labours in the world, or holding council, concerning the days to come. If any wanderer had chanced to pass, little would he have seen or heard, and it would have seemed to him only that he saw grey figures, carved in stone, memorials of forgotten things now lost in unpeopled lands. For they did not move or speak with mouth, looking from mind to mind; and only their shining eyes stirred and kindled as their thoughts went to and fro. (LotR III.263)."

8. A brief summary of *ósanwe-kenta* is perhaps in order. Tolkien's underlying premise is that minds, by their nature, perceive other minds without the assistance of any other sensory apparatus, but that actual transmission of thought or images from one mind to another requires an expenditure of will the sender and the "consent" of the receiving mind. Not even the most powerful of the Valar can "read" an unwilling mind by force, only by consent (solicited either freely or by persuasion).

9. By contrast to ordinary linguistic communication, which moves from signifier (words) to signified (meaning). Cf. Ramer's earlier remark to this effect on p. 202.

10. Note the description of Merry's sword-stroke to the Witch-king: "No other blade, not though mightier hands had wielded it, would have dealt that foe a wound so bitter, cleaving the undead flesh, breaking the spell that knit his unseen sinews to his will (LotR III.120)." Like the Lingerers, it is the Ringwraith's *will* that governs the form assumed by his "unseen sinews."

11. In one of his letters, Tolkien classified magic into two kinds, which he distinguished by the Greek words *magia* and *goeteia*. The first kind involves the production of concrete effects in the material world (like Gandalf's igniting wet wood on Caradhras); the second category comprises all effects that deceive or otherwise alter the mind's perception (Letters. 199-200). If the undead can manifest themselves only by means of *ósanwe*, it would follow that their capacity for producing "magical" effects would be limited to the realm of *goeteia*. Against this hypothesis may be set Lowdham's and Ramer's statements in HoMe IX.202, but the brevity of that discussion makes it difficult to know how far to take it. Would it apply to all spirits, or only to "faded" ones? What sorts of affectations to matter are being considered here? The text provides no clue.

12. Although Tolkien never translated *Úlairi*, the Quenya name for the Ringwraiths (Sil.267, 296, 300, 302; HoMe XII. 153, 175, 177-178, 193, 200, 201, 215-217, 233-234, 241), it is possible that he constructed it from the root ULUG "hideous, horrible," which morphologizes into *ul-* in Quenya *ulundo* "monster, deformed or hideous creature" (HoMe V.396). Tolkien may have joined this element with a derivative of GAYA "fear, dread" (HoMe XI.400, XII.363; cf. V.358), thus rendering *"ulugairë* > *úlairë/úlairi* "horrible terror." Another possibility would be to divide the word as Ú (the negative prefix) + lairë/lairi, derived from the root LAYA "be alive, flourish" (QL.52), so that Úlairi would mean "the Unliving." Attractive as this alternative may seem, it has a number of problems. First, the -rë ending of the implied singular of *lairi* (*lairë*) usually marks abstract or collective nouns, not persons (e.g., almarë "blessedness," *fairë* "radiance," *nairë* "lament," *nessë* "youth"). Also, Tolkien elsewhere uses the form *lairë* for "summer" (LotR III.385-386; Letters.282). I am indebted to David Salo for this interpretation of Úlairi.

13. With this compare Legolas and Gimli's recollections about the Oathbreakers: "And lo! In the darkness of Mordor my hope rose; for in that gloom the Shadow Host seemed to grow stronger and more terrible to look upon....I know not whether their blades would still bite, for the Dead needed no longer any weapon but fear (LotR III.150, 152)."

14. Recall again the end of the passage dealing with the Houseless Elves: "Or the Houseless may plead for shelter, and if it is admitted, then it will seek to enslave its host and use both his will and his body for its own purposes. It is said that Sauron did these things, and taught his followers how to achieve them (HoMe X.223-224)." Consider also the etymology of the Sindarin element *gûl*, "evil or perverted knowledge, necromancy, sorcery," which in Black Speech takes on the meaning of "wraith" when combined with *nazg* "ring" (HoMe X.350).

15. It is by no means clear that the Elven-rings would have turned mortal wearers into undead apart from the intervention of the One Ring. More likely, the torment of longevity would lead to a violent severance of spirit from body, as in the hypothetical scenario of mortals in Aman.

16. In ICE's *Southern Gondor* modules it is postulated that the stone was a gift to the Númenorean royal house from Aman (like the *palantíri)*, and that it came originally from Mandos, whose power as Judge of the Dead it manifested for this sole purpose (Eru having granted Mandos prophetic foreknowledge of the Oathbreaking and its significance for the fall of Sauron).

17. There was moonlight on Weathertop that night, thoug apparently it did not reveal the Ringwraiths' weapons to Frodo's companions (LotR 1.206-207).

18. The Morgul-knife's radiance would be particularly significant if it were a concentration of the Morgoth-element. (See our comment on p. 10-11)

19. Gandalf appears to refer to this when he considers Frodo's condition at Rivendell: "He may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can (LotR 1.235)."

20. There is a brief description when Frodo sits on Amon Hen: "At first he could see little: He seemed to be in a world of mist in which there were only shadows: the Ring was upon him. Then here and there the mist gave way and he saw many visions (LotR I.416)." There is also an interesting aside when Sam re-enters Shelob's lair with the Ring on: "It no longer seemed very dark to him in the tunnel, rather it was as if he had stepped out of a thin mist into a heavier fog (LotR 11.345)."

21. According to Pengolodh, "distance in itself offers no impediment whatever to *ósanwe* (OK.24)."

22. A possible analogy might be an object (say, an unlit candlestick standing upon a table) located beneath a powerful sun-lamp. If I (representing the searching mind) shine a hand-held flashlight at the candlestick while the sun-lamp is turned off, it will cast a shadow, but if I try to do the same thing when the lamp is turned on, my light will not be strong enough to produce a shadow.

23. There is also the "thematic" association of the Dead with Mandos, the Doomsman of the Valar, whose role as prophet is amply attested in the pages of *Quenta Silmarillion*. Perhaps the Oathbreakers, in their pseudo-purgatorial environment, enjoy some growing rapport with the Judge of the Dead.

24. See Christopher Tolkien's further remarks on this in UT.344.

25. For the same reason we omit consideration of the effect of Elbereth's name.

26. Ramer perceives this difference in the passage quoted on p. above.

27. It need not be supposed that the ghostly horses Legolas saw were "real." More likely they were simply part of the self-image projected by the mind of those Oathbreakers who in life had been accustomed to ride horses, just as their banners and weapons also were mnemonic constructs.

RASTARIN'S LOG

Bridget Buxton

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE GWAEDHEL-SWORD

Rastarin and Clennan team up with Konar the barbarian to recover the legendary Gwaedhel-sword from Fuinur's Well, and get more than they bargained for when Clennan decides to rekindle an old flame - rather explosively. Undaunted by the ethical complexities, Rastarin attempts to combine their mission for World Peace with a bit of piratical plundering. As usual, however, her cunning plan turns out to be not quite cunning enough...

To Daeron, Steward of Gondor,

By the time this letter reaches you from Gurthost the siege of Pelargir will be broken, and you (as is only to be expected) shall once again find yourself on the winning side. I write to confirm that both Prince Sangahyandion of Umbar and his brother Arkhâd are dead, as is Captain Hardon and (we suspect) Zimrakhil the Southron Ambassador. I fear that Lytta, Rassimus, Telcontar, the Elendilmir and TCBS are also lost. Tarassis now returnd to Gondor a changed man, and I beg you to secure hid pardon from King Tarondor. Like do many who have been caught in the clutches of Irusan's evil cabal, he was deceived into believing that his treachery would serve some ultimate good...

Rastarin goes on to report the progress of her quest for Neithan's sword (apparently negligible) and the hope for own release from Irusan's spirit-link (probably vain). She encloses the letter with a bottle of scrumpy, and is just wondering how she might get it delivered when suddenly the spectral figure of Lytta appears. The Oathbreaker presents Rastarin with her final piece of the Karajaz, the star-map that will enable her to follow Neithan's trail across the Mirror of Fire. Time is running out to recover the Gwaedhel-sword, for Lytta reports that Irusan is already preparing for battle against King Morthec.

'But how can I fight Irusan, when he seems able to control my very actions?' asks Rastarin miserably. 'Perhaps he WANTS me to return with the sword. What if in seeking to destroy him I am actually serving his purpose?' '

I see you have guessed the truth,' answers Lytta. 'Indeed it was your hand that slew Sangahyandion, at Irusan's bidding, and your letter that prompted Arkhâd to challenge Herod, a contest he could not survive. But for you there is only one hope of release from Irusan's influence: you must seek the aid of the Old One of Tûl Póac, and then find healing in the waters of Fuinur's Well.'

The Oathbreaker takes Daeron's letter and departs, while Rastarin, Clennan, and Konar set sail for Umbar. Defying the heavy price on her head, Rastarin seeks out the aging Lord Sangahyando, and tries to explain how her fateful blood-pact with the cabal made her an unwitting instrument in the death of his two sons. Sangahyando listens without expression, his eyes fixed upon hers until he is satisfied of her honesty. Finally, Rastarin presents him with Arkhâd's signet ring, and Sangahyando accepts it with trembling hands.

'This is the signet ring of Castamir, which should have gone to my sons and their sons,' he says. 'But if, as you say, you are sworn to seek vengeance against their true murderer, then take it with my blessing.' Rastarin is encouraged by the reconciliation, and rejoins her friends at the Drunken Goose filled with hope for peace between Gondor and Umbar. '

Gondor? Umbar?' grunts Konar. 'The only thing you'll get is pieces.'

The next morning the adventurers join up with a caravan crossing the Dune Sea to Tûl Póac. To cut a long story short, they survive the journey across the desert, find the Old One, hack and slay their way through an unexpected encounter with Irusan's nasties, and cross the dreaded Mirror of Fire. At Fuinur's Well Rastarin is finally healed of Irusan's malevolent influence, and she and Clennan swim down into Fuinur's sunken halls. There they are strangely still able to see, breathe, and talk, perhaps due to some magical property of the water.

The drowned labyrinth of Fuinur is indeed wonderful and vast beyond imagining. After exploring at length, Clennan and Rastarin finally find their way into a huge chamber lined with armoured knights and a great courtly procession, all frozen in deathlike sleep. At the far end Fuinur sleeps upon his throne, the golden Karma of Aldarion resting at his feet. Rastarin lifts it, and the last king of the Black Númenóreans suddenly awakes. '

Oh dear,' says Clennan.

Fuinur, however, is not angry with the intruders. He begs Rastarin to grant him release from the immortality that Melkor promised him, which he says is only a deception and a curse.

'What of my uncle Neithan?' asks Rastarin.

'Long ago he came here,' Fuinur replies, 'seeking an end to his own suffering. He sought the darkness below.' Fuinur falls silent, and Rastarin gives him the peace he craves, plunging her jewelled dagger into his heart.

'The dead guy says we need to go down the left passage to find the sword,' she explains to Clennan, who has kept himself busy plundering some of the Fuinur's richly dressed courtiers.

'What's down the left passage?'

'Hell, apparently.'

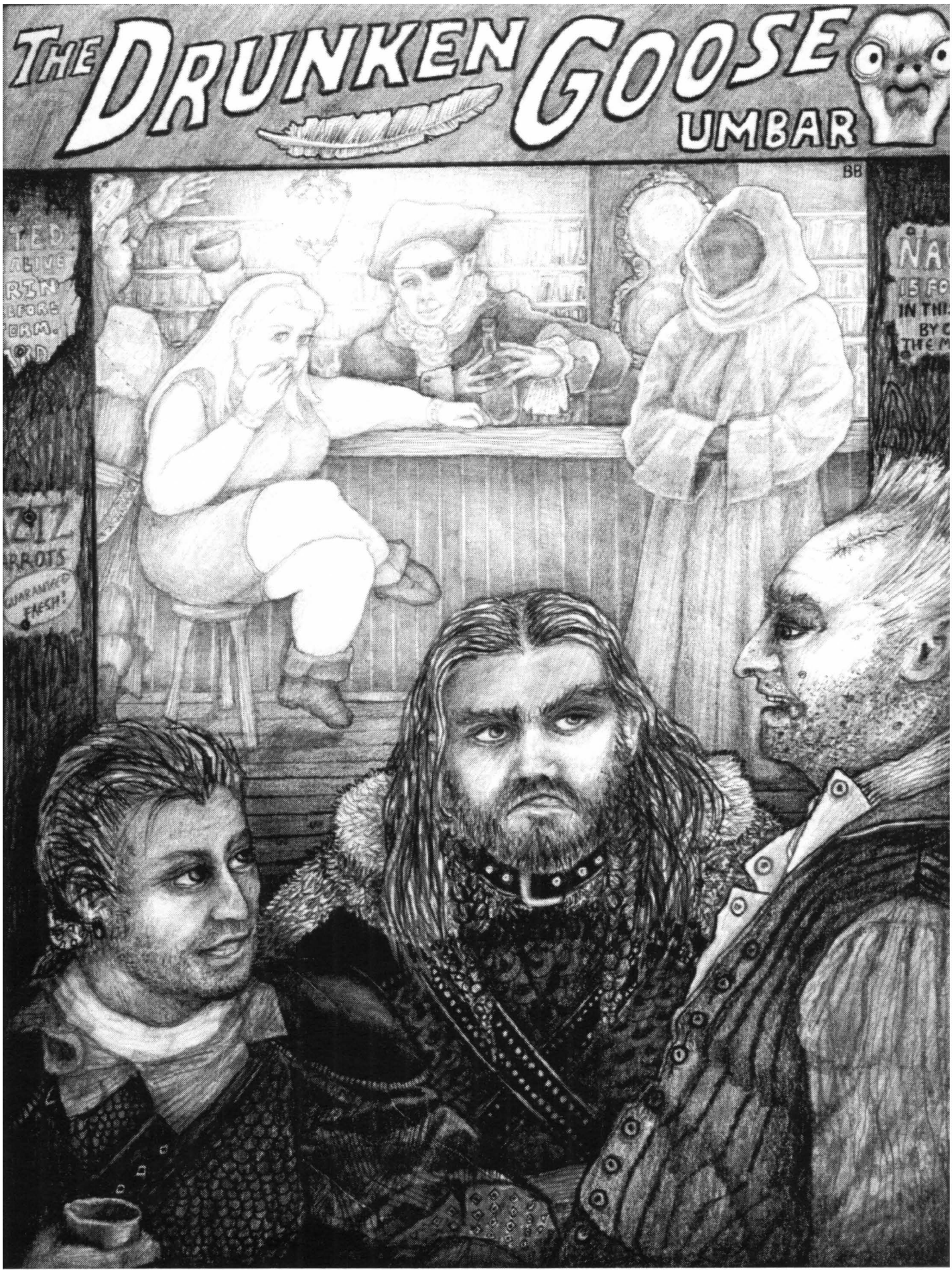
Clennan does not seem happy at this prospect, and nervously wonders what the consequences will be for slaying THE Fuinur of Fuinur's Well.

'It's all right, Clennan,' Rastarin reassures him. 'I'll say that you were just obeying orders when you killed Fuinur.'

'When we get to the edge of Hell, remind me to push you off!'

After a short distance the left passage ends in a vast black maw. The Gwaedhel-sword lies at the edge beside Neithan's last message, in which he leaves the blade for whomever would claim it, in the hope that it may bring honour once again to the house of Gundor. As Rastarin closes her hand around the magnificent hilt, she is at once enraptured by the magical tingling of the sword's power. 'The Dread Spoon of Justice is coming, Irusan!' she cries.

'Yeah, well I just hope you asked Fuinur


THE DRUNKEN GOOSE
UMBAR
BB

for directions to the exit before you killed him,' says Clennan. 'Rastarin? You did remember to ask him the way out... didn't you?'

Short cuts make long delays (and scrumpy makes longer ones) so we shall resume our story on the afternoon of the Hithui 17th, when Rastarin, Clennan, and Konar finally arrive back in Umbar. The adventurers naturally make a beeline for the Drunken Goose, where the usual rambunctious crowd of lowlife welcomes them, and Clennan is reunited with Gypsy, his beloved parrot. Rastarin's crewman Damrod is there too, and reports that he has booked their onward passage on Captain Delbo's Drowning Duck.

'Is there still a price on my head in Umbar?' asks Rastarin.

'Well... yeah, technically,' replies Damrod. 'But only for the usual stuff. They took the assassinating Sangahyandion part out.'

'That must be Lord Sangahyando's doing. I should like to meet him again, if I could.'

'I'll see what I can do,' promises Damrod, who walks away tapping his head in the universal gesture for 'these Dunedain are crazy.'

'Some people might think the idea of peace between Gondor and Umbar is completely insane,' Rastarin admits. 'But that's never stopped me before, and - oh, Clennan, isn't that your girlfriend over there: the fat one, yes – she's seen you, she's waving! Hey, her beard looks good today!'

'I hope I'm seeing double and she's not really that large,' mutters Konar, pounding his third scrumpy.

'And one for the lady over there,' says Clennan. 'I know what we need to do here, Captain. We need to get Gypsy a girlfriend!' At this point, the companions are approached by a shady-looking Haruze who has been listening in to their conversation. He introduces himself as Aziz (seemingly the name of every NPC in this town).

'I am the most supreme purveyor of parrots in Umbar,' he boasts, opening his cloak to reveal well ordered rows of 'parrots' hanging inside. 'We have this model here, the Bozisha blue, and this nice green one...'

'Do you have any live ones?' asks Rastarin sarcastically.

'How about that green one there?' demands Konar.

Aziz pulls out the green and slaps it onto the bar. 'Only twenty silver pieces!'

Rastarin chokes on her drink. 'That's not a parrot – that's a chicken painted to look like a parrot! Hey, what are you trying to push on us? And this, this isn't a parrot – it's a rat with feathers stuck to it.'

'I like that one!' cries Konar, buying it immediately. Rastarin relents and buys the chicken as an appropriate present for Daeron. They are saved from further imprudent purchases by the reappearance of Damrod, who has managed to obtain several extra bottles of naurnen. With a glance at the hilt of the Gwaedhel-blade, he observes that Rastarin found what she went for - the sword that kicks ass.

'And in my hands,' boasts Rastarin, 'it will kick ass - even more!' Konar suggests that they inscribe these words of power upon the blade there and then, but Rastarin is suddenly overcome by a powerful reluctance to allow the others to see or touch it. Unable to resist the sword's strange power, she begins to gasp, and finally thrusts the half-drawn blade back into its scabbard.

'Bathroom's over there, Rastarin,' says Konar impatiently.

'Now give me the sword!'

'Get away from me you foul creeping thing!' she gasps.

' Aaargh!'

'Reminds me of my honeymoon,' the barbarian laughs.

'Ah, the mist clears before my eyes,' Rastarin whispers.

'It becomes more obvious the more I drink - I mean think. This sword came to me for a reason! I have been marked out for some great destiny....Yes, my precious, I have some great task to fulfil before the end.'

Just then a uniformed guard enters the tavern and invites Rastarin to meet Lord Sangahyando outside in his private palanquin. So while Clennan, Konar, and Damrod make the acquaintance of Ray, a ship's navigator with serious dental problems, Rastarin and Sangahyando discuss war and politics. Rastarin dares to reveal her secret hope: that she may one day welcome the rebels back to Gondor under the rule of a pure-blooded descendant of Elendil (namely herself). Sangahyando is sceptical, especially when Rastarin explains that all the documents proving her lineage now lie the bottom of Mírlond's harbour. Nevertheless, he promises to represent Umbar's Council of Captains at a peace conference in Gondor if Rastarin should defeat Irusan and avenge his sons.

'The Captain's been gone a long time,' says Clennan. 'I think we should go find her.'

'Yeah, well you know how it is with women when they go to the bathroom,' says Konar. 'I went just now, didn't even need to stand up! Efficiency is at the heart of every barbarian.'

A moment later, Clennan and Konar lead a riotous crowd of drinkers out onto the street to look for Rastarin, and an impromptu scuffle ensues with Sangahyando's guards.

'Wait!' cries Rastarin, emerging from the palanquin. 'Don't start the brawl without me!' She launches into a passionate soliloquy on the dawn of a new age of peace and prosperity for Middle-earth (greeted by perfunctory clapping from the patrons of the Goose) with the proviso that naturally all plunder and crime would continue under her auspices (loud and violent applause from all sides).

The next day they prepare to depart Umbar, and Rastarin takes a quick inventory.

'We still seem to be two bottles of *naurnen* short. What happened to yours, Clennan?'

Clennan turns to the *mûmak-sized* woman beside him. 'What happened to those two bottles I left under the bed, darling?'

'Aww, gee, honey, I was so thirsty - and now I really need a drink of -water...'

'Help! Run!!!' shrieks Rastarin, as all those who still can hurl their shattered drunken bodies out onto the street. Moments later, an enormous blast of *naurnen* turns the Drunken Goose into a smoking crater.

'My favourite bar!' cries Rastarin in disgust, peeling a stray human ear off her shoulder. 'You blew it, Clennan.'

'I guess I always leave a trail of broken hearts behind me,' Clennan agrees sadly. And so the heroes continue on their way, well after the break of day, to where the Drowning Duck wallows in the worst parallel parking job they've ever seen. Captain Delbo casts off at once, and is at once cast into the brig with Daeron's chicken. Rastarin takes the helm, Ray navigates, and they proceed up the coast unmolested by any ship (although Rastarin does molest Clennan just a little bit).

'Clennan, somehow in a previous life, I

feel that we could have been together...'

'Well, we ARE together, Captain.'

'*Shhh, keep your voice down!*'

After a night of epic inebriation, the Master Sea Wolf sets sail for Pelargir with Konar, Rastarin, Clennan, Damrod, and the rest of Rastarin's crew. On the way up Anduin they drop in at the Balimur swamps for a meeting with Tevildo, lord of the T'malshi cats that once served Queen Berúthiel. Since it was Tevildo who gave her the first piece of the Karajaz, Rastarin feels obliged to report on the progress of her quest to recover the Gwaedhel-sword and the 'Kuilëondo' of Berúthiel. They travel through the night, until they reach the place known as Benish Armon, where Rastarin steps forward and kneels.

'Tevildo, I have fulfilled my bargain. Rastarin always fulfils her bargains!'

'Yeah!' shout Damrod and Clennan.

'Well, there was this one time-' Konar begins, but Rastarin cuts him off.

'I have recovered the Gwaedhel-sword and the Karma of Aldarion, and my uncle Neithan has destroyed the red stone that you fear. You are, of course, not able to thank him for this - but perhaps you would be willing to help me to fight Irusan.'

'I think you underestimate the power of what you carry, my dear Captain,' purrs Tevildo. 'The Lady of the Waters is of my order, and she is far greater than I. With the Karma you may call once upon her aid. But if you honour the dream of the one who is lost, destroy Irusan first. You must prove yourself worthy if you wish to take the throne of Gondor.'

Rastarin hangs her head in sorrow. 'Tevildo, you know about these things. Is there even the slightest hope that the dead may ever be brought back to life?'

'That you must decide for yourself, or be content that beyond death there may be more than memory.'

'That doesn't seem like a good deal.'

Tevildo purrs. 'Others will be offered, no doubt. More appealing. My only counsel to you, mortal, is beware - for Irusan knows your desires. He will try to bargain with you for the sword.'

'So it is a choice between power, and the life of a friend,' Rastarin sighs when they are back on board the Master Sea Wolf.

'Now where have I heard THAT before?' asks Clennan.

'Don't be sad, Captain,' says Damrod. 'We go to these holy sites and you get confused and depressed, and then we party some more and we burn something and you're all better again.'

'That's right!' says Rastarin. 'So let's go party and burn something - in Pelargir!'

Thus on Midday of the 25th of Hithui, Konar's ship makes a heroic entry into Pelargir. 'Pelargir!' cries Rastarin. 'Well, I suppose King Tarondor has left a letter for me, saying "Why, thank you, Captain Rastarin. I'm so glad I took the price off your head. After all, having you drawn and quartered was really a lesser option compared to having you SAVE MY SORRY ASS!"'

As the ship enters the Garth, Rastarin stands upon the prow wearing the Karma, and people on the quays stare in wonder. 'The Karma! The Karma has returned!' they shout, and others take up the cry until the whole city roars with excitement.

This is so great! I'm a superstar!'

'Are we going to burn something now?' Clennan asks.

'Soon!'

As they pull into dock they see the royal steward Daeron, regarding them without emotion, standing beside a sleek new ship. The Steward has thoughtfully commissioned Rastarin a new version of The Calm Before the Storm! Daeron walks up as Rastarin steps ashore. They greet each other warily at first, and then - as if by mutual agreement dropping all reserve - Daeron embraces her heartily. Guessing that their Captain probably has some 'talking' to do, Damrod, Clennan, and Konar go off to throw a clam party on the new TCBS. Meanwhile, Rastarin accompanies Daeron through cheering crowds to the Lord Captain's house, where a letter from King Tarondor awaits.

To the most esteemed Captain Rastarin, (Princess of Morthond),

The Steward and Lord Captain of Pelargir sends me word that you have been instrumental in the disbanding of Sangahyandion's dreadful siege. For this, the people of Pelargir will be eternally grateful, and you have my undying praise. I therefore intend to overlook all of your past 'indiscretions, and see to it that you receive a knighthood.

Rastarin laughs. 'A knighthood? What use do I have for a knighthood?' She crumples the letter and throws it angrily to the floor. 'This is all the thanks I get! But you know Daeron,' she continues, lowering her voice, 'this is no more than I expected: from a miserable, incompetent, half-witted...half-breed!' She reaches for her flask of scrumpy and is about to take a swig when Daeron stops her, producing the bottle she sent him from Gurthost.

'I thought I would save it for this occasion,' he says, popping the cork.

'How romantic,' she sighs. 'But I seem to remember that YOU chose power instead of true love. You agreed to a political marriage instead of following your heart, which is why the original Dread Pirate put this dagger in your stomach. Sangahyandion told me.'

'Did he now?' Daeron replies. 'Well, did he tell you I've spent the last 170 years trying to make it up to her?'

'But she's dead!'

'I know,' he replies, returning her gaze steadily. 'But not really.'

Daeron falls silent, and Rastarin tells him about her meeting with Sangahyando and the possibility of peace between Gondor and Umbar. Daeron shares her frustration with Tarondor's feeble leadership, and Rastarin talks boldly of her ambitions. But even as she speaks and holds the Karma, she begins to hear whispering inside her head: the voices of dead friends, old enemies, and all those who died thankless so that she might live. *Give it back to Pelargir. Give it back to Pelargir. Give it back to Pelargir...*

'These damn voices in my head! I don't know Daeron - do you think I've been drinking too much lately? Have I been overindulging in my own product?'

Yes. You are a scrumpaholic, whisper the voices.

'I should think so. But perhaps a good night's rest-'

'No!' Rastarin cries. 'I've found that scrumpy has been a fitting substitute for sleep and other needs of the body. Scrumpy and Clennan, that is.'

'How perverse,' says Daeron.

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